

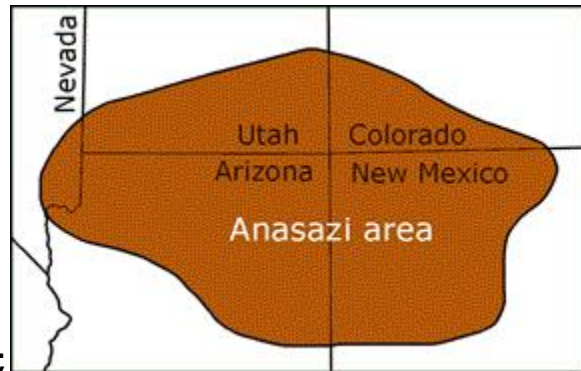
# Utah Prehistory Week Poster, 2006

## Who Painted the Images?

Utah's Prehistory Week Poster for 2006 contains a photograph of a painted dinosaur track along with other images created over 1,000 years ago. These ancient painted images are called **pictographs**. Images pecked into the stone are called **petroglyphs**. The pictographs in the poster were created by the Anasazi, or Ancestral Puebloans, who lived in what we today call southeastern Utah. The Anasazi lived and prospered in a large area that includes southern Utah, northern Arizona, southwestern Colorado, northwestern New Mexico and a small part of southern Nevada. The Anasazi

descended from the Archaic Culture who were part of an even larger group of people who lived in the western United States for 6,000 years before the Anasazi. What made the Anasazi different from these Archaic people was that they acquired new knowledge and skills. Some of these skills were: pottery making;

farming of corn, beans and squash; using the bow and arrow; building permanent masonry structures from stones, mortar and wooden beams; and the making of exceptional pictographs.



At first the Anasazi only had some of these skills and knowledge. They did not yet have pottery; however, they made amazing baskets. Some of them were woven so tightly that with a little pine pitch on the inside they could hold water. Because of this skill, these people are called the Basketmaker. Their descendants who lived in the large masonry structures are called the Puebloans. Following a series of devastating droughts, the Anasazi Culture ended in Utah around the year 1300.

## Where Did the Dinosaur Tracks Come From?

Going a lot farther back in time, something like 65 million years ago, southern Utah was a lot different than it is today. Dinosaurs walked along the shores of an ancient sea in the same place where the Anasazi would later paint their pictographs. The dinosaurs left their tracks in the sand and mud. Beneath the sand and mud were many other layers of sand and mud deposited from nearby

mountains as their soils washed into the sea. The dinosaur tracks were quickly covered by more layers of sand and mud that washed down from the mountains. Eventually these layers were covered over by so much dirt that they were buried deeply in the ground. The pressure of all the dirt above them turned the sand and mud into sandstone, siltstone and shale. Then millions of years later, this part of the earth began to rise. As the earth's crust was pushed upwards, rainwater began to form new canyons. The old seashore began to wash away. Rainwater eventually cut out deep canyons and created tall cliffs until, at last, the land looks like it does today.

The sand and mud on the seashore where the dinosaurs once walked is now a ledge on the edge of a sandstone cliff, which you can see in the small picture in the poster. You can also see some of the many layers of mud and sand that were both below and above the dinosaur tracks. The layers are different because the materials that made the layers came from different places. The red color comes from minerals (iron and manganese). These same minerals created the red-orange sand in the Coral Pink Sand Dunes State Park, which is also in southeastern Utah.

### **What Can We Learn From the Paintings?**

Sometime between 1,000 and 2,000 years ago, people discovered a way to travel between the valley at bottom of the cliffs and the top of the cliffs without having to walk a long distance. They had only to hammer out a few footholds in one cliff. On top of cliffs, there is a plateau where there are many Pinyon Pine trees. At the end of summer, these trees produce an abundant crop of pine nuts, which the Archaic and Basketmaker used for food during the winter. The route went up through the cliffs and past the dinosaur tracks. The pictographs were painted on the back of an overhanging ledge that is below the tracks. The overhang provided shelter from the sun and rain, not only for the people but also for the pictographs. If the paintings were not protected from the rain, snow and blowing sand they would not be here today.

These pictographs provide important information about the Basketmaker people and their way of life. As you look at the painting, you will notice that some of the figures were painted over or superimposed the top of other figures. The painted dinosaur track and the two large solidly-painted figures with arms and legs are superimposed over the row of small figures that have their arms out in front of them. We know then, that the painted dinosaur track and the two solidly painted figures are newer than the row of small

figures. The thing we do not know is how much time passed between the first painting and the second painting.

You will also notice that the paint used to create all of the images is nearly the same color. How did different people at two different times have nearly the same color paint with them? The answer is because the source of the pigment used to make the paint is right below the panel. At the bottom of the overhang, there is a thin layer of soft dark reddish-brown shale that is the same color as the paint in the pictographs.

### **What was Painted First?**

The first image that was painted under the overhang appears to have been a small faint figure that is on the right side of the dinosaur track. It has arms and ? for legs and either large bug eyes or a large headdress. This figure appears to be the oldest image because it is more faded than any other figure. In addition, it has a different form. If this observation is correct, then there are *three* different ages of paintings. Perhaps there are even more than that.



The row of small human figures was painted next. There are two groups of these figures and they face each other. There appears to be 10 on the left side and 9 on the right side. Each person has both of their arms stretched out in front of them and their legs are bent at the knees. What would you be doing if you looked like this? These figures appear to depict dancers.

### **Scratching, Abrasion and Hammering on the Petroglyphs.**

If you look closely at the dancers, you will notice that someone scratched over them. These deep scratches go nearly all the way across all of the dancers. The scratching could have been done with a sharp stone tool, perhaps a scraper. You will also notice that some of the dancers near the right side seem to be missing most of their bodies. This is because someone, possibly hundreds of years ago, rubbed a smooth stone over the dancers, apparently in an effort to remove them. Fortunately for us, it did not work very well.



Notice also that there are pecked marks on the dancers. Someone pounded on the dancers with the sharp point of a rock. The footprints or tracks above the row of dancers and the humanlike figure on the left side of the panel with its arms hanging down also have been pecked.

There is also an area of abrasion, scratching and hammering between the two rows of dancers. This suggests that a figure or figures were also erased from this area. If there was something here, all of the dancers would have been facing this image.

After all this abrading, scratching, and hammering, the dinosaur track was painted in the center of the dancers. The paint covers some of the dancers and most of the damaged area, and whatever was originally here. The other large figures with their arms hanging down were also apparently painted on the panel at the same time.

### **Unanswered Questions.**

It is evident that these pictographs are more complex than they appear at first. After studying this panel, many questions arise. Unfortunately, there are not many answers. Some of the questions, and perhaps some of the answers, are discussed below.

Why were the dancing figures dancing? Perhaps they were celebrating the pine-nut harvest. What do these dancers tell us about the social relationships of the Basketmaker people? The portrayal of a *group* of dancers indicates that the people living in this area during this time apparently assembled together for community activities.

Why were the dancing figures scratched, abraded and hammered? What does this tell us about the different people that passed by the panel? Did they have respect for the images that were created by other people, or were they displeased with them? Why would someone be displeased by some simple drawings of people dancing? Apparently, the images had meanings that someone liked and someone else disliked. This indicates that these images were of some consequence, both to the people who made them and to those who modified them. These images then, were an important part of the lives of the Basketmaker people.

When did the scratching, abrading, and hammering take place? Was it done by someone shortly after it was painted or the following year, or was it done by someone many years later? What was the significance of the dinosaur track and why was it placed in the center of the rows of dancers? What was erased before the dinosaur track was painted? What did the Basketmakers think made the dinosaur tracks? Since the tracks resemble those of a bird, perhaps they thought a giant bird made the tracks. Most of the larger figures have large long arms. Do these figures depict birds and not people, or are they people in bird costumes?

These are just some of the questions that archeologists try to answer. Other pictograph and petroglyph panels may hold clues to help answer these and other questions. That is why it is so important to preserve these traces of the past, even if we do not yet understand what they mean.

### **Information Provided by Steven Manning**

## **10 Do's and Don'ts for Visiting Pictographs.**

### **Please,**

- 1.) Do enjoy being at a place where other people lived hundreds or thousands of years ago. Try to think what life must have been like for the people who made the pictographs. How many pine nuts would you have to gather to provide food for you and your family through the winter?
- 2.) Do try and answer questions like: When were these images made? What do they mean? Why were they made? Who made them? Why were they important to the people who made them?

- 3.) Do remember that the pictographs may still be considered sacred to the Native Americans living today. Community and sacred dances are still a vital part of the lives of Native Americans.
- 4.) Do take time to appreciate the creativity of the prehistoric artisans who painted these and other pictograph panels.
- 5.) Do pick up any litter left by thoughtless visitors and dispose of it properly.

**Please,**

- 1.) Do not remove anything left at or near the pictographs. That especially includes arrowheads and pottery. Every artifact, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant tells archaeologists something about the people who were there. From these artifacts, we can learn who they were, when they were here, whom they traded with and even where they had traveled.
- 2.) Do not touch the pictographs. Oils and acids from your fingerprints damage the images.
- 3.) Do not add anything - it is perfect as it is. Writing your name or drawing pictures on the rocks is vandalism. Graffiti attracts more graffiti and eventually the prehistoric pictures will be damaged, and maybe even destroyed.
- 4.) Do not climb over or around the images. You may damage something that you have not seen.
- 5.) Do not build fires or leave things behind—especially garbage.

If you see ongoing vandalism to any historic or archaeological site including rock art, call local law enforcement or the BLM Law Enforcement Hotline at 1-800-521-6501.